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A Census and Economic Survey of the Blind in California

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FOREWORD

Passive sympathy for the blind is being rapidly replaced by organized effort to provide for them needed aid on a common sense basis for the achievement of life satisfactions. For many years the state has provided services in the way of state aid, industrial workshops, raised print instruction and library facilities, home handicraft instruction and vocational training, which have been of greatest benefit, but there has been a feeling that a larger number of the blind may become self-sustaining.

As a first step toward a better solution of the problem, a census of the blind and a survey of their present status were essential. The cooperation of the State Emergency Relief Administration made possible such a survey, sponsored by the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation of the State Department of Education and carried out by the Bureau in cooperation with the California Council for the Blind.

This bulletin contains a report of the project submitted by H. D. Hicker, Chief of the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Perry Sundquist, Project Supervisor. It is hoped that the data thus made available will aid the various interested agencies both public and private in their efforts on behalf of the blind.

C. L. Jersey

Superintendent of Public Instruction

21406

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PREFACE

California is conceded to be one of the leading states with respect to services for the blind. It is further conceded, however, that the problems of suitable employment for the capable blind and adequate provision for those clearly unemployable and those who may be made partially self-supporting have not been solved. As an aid in solving these and other problems, the California Council for the Blind requested the cooperation of the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation in making an accurate census and a comprehensive economic survey of the blind in California.

The Bureau was glad to comply. Details of the scope of the survey and the procedure to be followed were worked out by the Chief of the Bureau in cooperation with the Research Committee of the California Council for the Blind. Authorization was secured from the State Emergency Relief Administration to make this a special phase of a research project being conducted by the Bureau, the necessary personnel for the project being thus provided on a work relief basis.

The survey required a period of four months for completion, from December 1, 1934, to March 31, 1935. One Project Supervisor and twenty-four clerical assistants were employed for a total of 2,894 work hours, representing a cost of $1,656.40. Other expenditures were, postage $460 and stationery and printing $40, bringing the total cost of the project to $2,156.40.

The extent of the clerical work involved is indicated by the fact that 12,328 separate letters were mailed out and 5,162 returns were received, read, checked, tabulated, and filed.

Special acknowledgement is due to the following persons whose assistance and cooperation made the project a success: Perry Sundquist, Project Supervisor, a former graduate of the California School for the Blind; The Research Committee of the California Council for the Blind, consisting of Dr. Newel Perry, President (ex officio), H. D. Hicker, Chairman, Mrs. Kathleen Michael, Los Angeles, Jacobus ten Broeck, Berkeley (Blind), and Mr. Sundquist, Los Angeles; Richard Flambert, Rehabilitation Research Project Director, for the statistical work; and Sidney M. Karns, Rehabilitation Project Supervisor for Southern California.

Acknowledgement is also due to the many interested agencies both public and private which contributed information and suggestions of value. Special mention may well be made of the State Emergency Relief Administration, and to point out again that the project was a

joint endeavor participated in by the SERA, the State Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the California Council for the Blind. Without the active participation of all three agencies, this census and economic survey of the blind would not have been possible.

As a result of the census the actual number of blind residing in the state has been ascertained. As a result of the economic survey, pertinent and revealing data relative to the economic and social status of the blind is available. Conclusions may be drawn from a study of these data with every assurance of their soundness and general applicability to all of the blind of California. A sound foundation has thus been laid upon which intelligently directed effort may erect a structure of service designed to meet the needs of the visually handicapped. From the point of departure established by definite knowledge rather than the guesses and estimates hitherto used, the many agencies concerned with the welfare of the blind both public and private may safely proceed in concerted attack upon the problem of aiding the blind to improve their economic status and to be enabled to live fuller and happier lives.

H. D. Hicker
Chief, Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation

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A CENSUS AND ECONOMIC SURVEY OF THE BLIND

PURPOSE

The Federal Census of 1930 enumerated the blind population of California as 2,597. That figure was known to be much too small; state records as of January, 1935, included the names of 3,216 who were receiving state aid. But just how many were there in all? How many were self-supporting? How many were of employable age? In what occupations have they been successful? How many needed aid for economic or social adjustment?

It was the purpose of the survey to provide accurate answers to these and other questions affecting the blind, in order that improved service might be effectively planned and aid provided to fill needs definitely ascertained rather than merely estimated.

The immediate objectives were: (1) to determine the actual number of persons in California who are visually handicapped to the extent that they are classified as blind, and (2) to secure pertinent data relative to their social and economic status from a sufficiently large number of blind persons to insure the soundness of conclusions based upon these data.

PROCEDURE

The first phase of the actual work on the project consisted in requesting every public and private agency concerned with the welfare of the blind in the state, as well as interested individuals, to cooperate with the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation and the California Council for the Blind by sending in lists of names and addresses of all blind and partially blind persons known to them. This was done and the response was immediate and gratifying. Almost every public and private agency in the state, as well as all national agencies concerned with the welfare of the blind and many individuals in a position to help, cooperated fully in the work of the census and survey. Over 100 different lists were sent in, each containing from 50 to 3000 names.

As these lists were received they were carefully checked for duplications by the staff of clerical assistants. Each new name, together with the address, was entered on a card and placed in the master file. It was necessary to ascertain the county in which each person resided and to note this at the bottom of the card, so that a table showing the distribution of the blind by counties could eventually be compiled.

The next step was to mail a questionnaire and an accompanying letter from the President of the Council to each person whose name and address was on file. A stamped, addressed envelope was included with each letter for convenience in returning the completed questionnaire. A total of 8,563 questionnaires and accompanying letters were sent out, and it was the replies to these which enabled the clerical staff to eliminate the names of those who had moved from the state and those who were deceased.

If no reply to the questionnaire and letter was received within two weeks, as shown by the date on the card, a follow-up letter was sent, urging cooperation with the Bureau and the Council. It was found necessary to mail out 3,765 follow-up letters.

After checking and making appropriate notations on the master card file, the questionnaires returned were submitted to the Research Project statistical section for analysis and tabulation.

Finally, a check was made in each county to insure the accuracy of the master card file on which the census was based.

THE CENSUS

A grand total of 7,518 names of blind and partially blind persons were obtained from the lists sent in, exclusive of all duplications. However, of this number, our questionnaires elicited the information that 455 were recently deceased, 55 stated that they were not blind or even economically so, and 48 had moved from the state. Therefore, there are at least 6,960 blind or partially blind persons actually living in California at the present time.

While it would be presumptuous to arbitrarily state that the approximately 7,000 blind found to be living in the state at present is actually the entire number, nevertheless it is a very close approximation. So thorough has the coverage of the state been, county by county, that it seems fair to assume that, while it is inconceivable that all of the blind were found, still the final figure of 6,960 represents an exceedingly close estimate.

The distribution of the blind by counties is shown in Table I.

While almost half of the number of blind persons in California reside in one county, Los Angeles, this is comparable to the figures for the general population of the state, though somewhat higher in percentage. It is also interesting to note that the distribution is scattered over 57 of the 58 counties of the state.

TABLE I

Distribution of the Blind According to County of Residence

County	*Total Number*	*Male*	*Female*	*Under 60*	*Over 60*	*Age not stated*
Alameda	705	403	302	158	141	406
Alpine	---	---	---	---	---	---
Amador	10	9	1	4	2	4
Butte	65	41	24	10	11	44
Calaveras	5	3	2	---	3	2
Colusa	12	8	4	4	2	6
Contra Costa	45	33	12	19	12	14
Del Norte	2	1	1	---	1	1
El Dorado	7	6	1	---	1	6
Fresno	97	66	31	21	27	19
Glenn	30	18	12	4	11	15
Humboldt	38	25	13	12	9	17
Imperial	5	5	---	1	---	4
Inyo	5	3	2	---	---	5
Kern	58	37	21	17	15	26
Kings	24	20	4	7	7	10
Lake	5	3	2	---	2	3
Lassen	8	5	3	3	1	4
Los Angeles	3,372	1,813	1,559	795	1,101	1,476
Madera	29	20	9	5	4	20
Marin	29	20	9	2	4	23
Mariposa	2	1	1	---	1	1
Mendocino	27	22	5	4	5	18
Merced	17	9	8	4	2	11
Modoc	9	7	2	2	1	6
Mono	3	3	---	2	---	1
Monterey	32	19	13	4	7	21
Napa	77	53	24	9	11	57
Nevada	16	11	5	5	1	10
Orange	114	70	44	28	51	35
Placer	30	16	14	6	7	17
Plumas	2	2	---	---	---	2
Riverside	48	32	16	17	14	17
Sacramento	149	98	51	27	33	89
San Benito	6	3	3	1	3	2
San Bernardino	90	52	38	20	29	41
San Diego	294	155	139	51	80	163
San Francisco	555	333	222	76	86	393
San Joaquin	98	65	33	18	24	56
San Luis Obispo	26	17	9	2	6	18
San Mateo	31	11	20	8	5	18
Santa Barbara	52	29	23	17	8	27
Santa Clara	174	89	85	36	45	93
Santa Cruz	29	18	11	3	13	13
Shasta	26	21	5	6	9	11
Sierra	5	1	4	---	4	1
Siskiyou	30	18	12	3	7	20
Solano	18	10	8	3	5	10
Sonoma	65	37	28	15	16	34
Stanislaus	55	35	20	17	13	25
Sutter	6	5	1	1	---	5
Tehama	10	6	4	2	3	5
Trinity	3	2	1	---	1	2
Tulare	88	57	31	19	31	38
Tuolumne	19	14	5	3	8	8
Ventura	22	13	9	1	8	13
Yolo	14	6	8	3	1	10
Yuba	21	12	9	2	4	15
County unknown	146	80	66	---	---	146
Grand totals	6,960	3,966	2,994	1,477	1,896	3,587

THE ECONOMIC SURVEY

A grand total of 3,512 or approximately 50 per cent of the questionnaires[1] was returned. This percentage is high and assures a sound basis for the statistical data. The significant trends revealed by a study of each of the statistical tables presented in this report are based upon a sufficiently large number of answers to warrant the assumption of their application to all of the blind of California.

Sex

The distribution of the blind according to sex for the entire blind population of the state as indicated in Table I affords an opportunity to test the accuracy of the information given on the 3,512 questionnaires returned. It will be noted that of the 6,960 blind persons recorded in the census, 3,966 or 57 per cent are males and 2,994 or 43 per cent are females. This compares very closely with the percentages shown in Table II.

TABLE II

Distribution of the Blind According to Sex

Sex	*Number*	*Per cent*
Male	1,915	55.6
Female	1,539	43.8
Not stated	22	.6
Total	3,512	100.0

The excess of males over females among the blind is noticeably higher than the usual ratio. The excess is almost 12 per cent while the latest U. S. Census gives only 1.2 per cent more males than females. This may be partially accounted for by the fact that many cases of blindness are the result of industrial accidents, and men ordinarily follow more hazardous occupational pursuits than women.

Age

Obviously the matter of age is an important factor in an economic survey. This is especially true in the case of the blind where the employable period is probably shorter than in the case of the sighted. If we assume that the employable period for the blind is from the age of 20 to 50, it will be seen that only approximately 22 per cent of the blind population have a reasonable opportunity for employment, even assuming that they may be otherwise qualified. Table III shows a complete distribution of the blind according to age.

[1] See sample form of questionnaire in Appendix, page 39.

TABLE III

Distribution of the Blind According to Age

Age groups	*Number*	*Per cent*
Below 10 years	4	.1
10–19 years	419	12.0
20–29 years	174	5.0
30–39 years	208	6.0
40–49 years	306	8.7
50–59 years	478	13.6
60 or over	1,911	54.4
Not stated	12	.2
Total	3,512	100.0

It will be noted that only a very small number of blind persons are under 20 years of age, 12.1 per cent, while a surprisingly large number are over 60 years of age, 54.4 per cent. This uneven distribution is due largely to the operation of two factors; the results of years of excellent work done in the field of prevention of blindness, and the fact that a large number lose their sight late in life as the result of disease or accident.

Place of Birth

While place of nativity has less to do with the economic situation of the blind than some of the other factors, it is of interest to note the proportion of the blind in the state who are native born as compared with the number born abroad, as indicated in Table IV.

TABLE IV

Distribution of the Blind According to Place of Birth

Nativity	*Number*	*Per cent*
Native born	2,890	82.3
Foreign born	606	17.2
Not stated	16	.5
Total	3,512	100.0

More than 82 per cent of the blind are native born, and only 17 per cent foreign born. These percentages are slightly different from those given for the country as a whole by the latest U. S. Census (1930), which gives 88.4 per cent native and only 11.6 per cent foreign born.

Marital Status

The question is frequently raised as to whether blind persons are financially able to marry. Information is not available as to the

number who married following the incidence of blindness but Table V indicates the present status of the blind in the state with respect to marital condition.

TABLE V

Distribution of the Blind According to Marital Status

Marital status	*Number*	*Per cent*
Single	1,510	43.0
Married	1,031	29.4
Widow	521	14.8
Widower	178	5.1
Separated	75	2.1
Not stated	197	5.6
Total	3,512	100.0

If the number of blind under 20 years of age is eliminated from consideration in this analysis, it is found that approximately 50 per cent are single and 50 per cent are married or have been married. This is a departure from the percentages for the general population. According to the Federal Census of 1930, 60 per cent are married, including all persons 15 years of age or over. If 20 years had been used as a minimum age, the proportion of married persons would have been even larger. The much higher percentage of single persons among the blind is accounted for by the fact that blindness often results in economic dependency, thus precluding the advisability of marriage in a great many instances.

Family Status

The findings with reference to the number of blind persons who are heads of families are in agreement with the general expectation that the percentage would be comparatively small. The figures are shown in Table VI.

TABLE VI

Number and Percentage of the Blind Who Are Heads of Families

	Number	*Per cent*
Head of family	979	27.9
Not head of family	2,418	68.9
Not stated	115	3.2
Total	3,512	100.0

The relatively small number of blind who list themselves as heads of families is probably due to the fact that blindness constitutes such a staggering economic handicap that, even when the blind person is

married, his inability to support even himself makes it impossible for him to consider himself the head of the family according to the usual meaning of the term; that is, the breadwinner of the family.

Number of Dependents

The picture of family relationships is not complete without information as to the extent to which the blind have other persons dependent upon them. This data is presented in Table VII.

TABLE VII

Distribution of the Blind According to Number of Dependents

	Number	*Per cent*
Blind with one or more dependents	772	22.0
Blind with no dependents	2,740	78.0
Total	3,512	100.0
CLASSIFICATION OF DEPENDENTS		
With one minor dependent	169	
With two minor dependents	98	
With three minor dependents	47	
With four minor dependents	38	
With five or more minor dependents	25	
Total	377	
With one adult dependent	601	
With two adult dependents	123	
With three adult dependents	6	
With four adult dependents	20	
Total	772	

The large number of blind without any dependents is explained by their own economic status. The fact that, in the vast majority of cases, blindness is tantamount to economic dependence appears in one form or another again and again, causing many of the statistical tables to veer sharply from the norm. The total number of adult dependents listed, over twice the number of minor dependents listed, is undoubtedly made so abnormally high by the inclusion of the spouse as a dependent in most cases. Strictly speaking, however, the spouse of the blind individual is not actually an economic dependent in most instances. The high figure given for the total number of adult dependents must, then, be considered as reflecting the total number of dependents only in the conventional sense, rather than to be regarded as a true estimate of the number of actual economic dependents.

Degree of Blindness

In a survey using the questionnaire method it is practically impossible to secure data from the blind themselves as to degree of blindness as this would be measured and recorded by an optometrist or oculist. It is sufficient for practical purposes, however, to know whether the blind person has light perception, can recognize friends by sight or can read newspaper headlines. This terminology was therefore used in the questionnaire, and conclusions drawn from the answers as indicated in Table VIII.

TABLE VIII

Distribution of the Blind According to Degree of Blindness

Degree	*Number*	*Per cent*
Totally blind	1,318	37.5
Partially blind	2,194	62.5
Total	3,512	100.0

All of the persons included in this survey are blind in the sense that their vision is so extremely defective that even those who have some degree of sight are virtually precluded from following ordinary occupations on a competitive basis. The partially blind are therefore often referred to as "commercially blind" or "economically blind." This classification includes a rather wide range from bare light perception to the ability to read large newspaper headlines. It does not include, however, less serious cases of defective vision or cases handicapped by loss of vision in one eye only.

Period of Blindness

It is well known that persons born blind or who lost their sight in infancy differ materially from those blinded in later life after they have become accustomed to the sighted world. This factor is therefore of special significance to those who are working with the blind. Table IX classifies the blind in this particular respect.

TABLE IX

Distribution of the Blind According to Period of Blindness

	Number	*Per cent*
Congenital	194	5.5
Less than 1 year	40	1.1
1 to 5 years	968	27.6
6 to 10 years	716	20.4
11 to 20 years	556	15.8
More than 20 years	628	17.9
Total	3,512	100.0

TABLE X

Distribution of the Blind According to Cause of Blindness

Cause	*Number*	*Per cent*
Disease	2,132	60.6
Accident	489	14.0
Unknown	518	14.8
Not stated	373	10.6
Total	3,512	100.0
CLASSIFICATION OF DISEASE CAUSES		
Specific Eye Diseases		
Cataract	608	17.2
Detached retina	5	.1
Glaucoma	239	6.8
Hemorrhage	16	.5
Trachoma	25	.7
Tumor	13	.4
Ulcers	3	.1
Total	909	25.8
General Disease Conditions		
Congenital	203	5.8
Influenza	14	.4
Measles	40	1.1
Nerve diseases	232	6.6
Old age	103	2.9
Paralysis	2	.1
Strain (poor light)	7	.2
Scarlet fever	17	.5
Venereal diseases	2	.1
Other diseases	603	17.1
Total	1,223	34.8
CLASSIFICATION OF ACCIDENT CAUSES		
Fire	9	.3
Home	32	.9
Industrial	137	3.9
War	3	.1
Other	308	8.8
Total	489	14.0

Almost one-half of all those surveyed have been blind for ten years or less. This is consistent with the age distribution of the blind, and reflects from another angle the same truth; namely, that most of the blind become so later in life. However, there is a large group that has been blind during most of their lifetime, due chiefly to infectious diseases and accidents occurring in childhood. Fortunately, this class is having its ranks rapidly decimated by the encouraging strides which have been made in the fields of sight conservation and prevention of

blindness. The period of blindness is highly significant when we come to consider such matters as measures designed to improve the economic status of the blind, the determination of the employability of the blind, and the question of teaching the blind to read raised print. There is a difficult period of readjustment which must ensue immediately after the loss of sight, before the blind individual may find his bearings in his new world. Since there is always a large number facing this difficult readjustment period, the field here for expert guidance, constructive criticism, and intelligent assistance is large.

Cause of Blindness

The data in this classification are not so complete as in others, since 25 per cent of those sending in questionnaires either did not know or did not state the cause of blindness. It is believed, however, that the replies given are sufficient to indicate adequately distribution according to cause of blindness, as shown in Table X.

Disease accounts for more than 60 per cent of all blindness, and of this number more than half result from some general disease rather than from specific diseases of the eye. It is quite possible that the percentage of cases resulting from venereal disease, namely, 0.1 per cent, is inaccurate. Other surveys show a considerably larger number in this classification and it is obvious that many would be reluctant to voluntarily report such a condition as the cause of their blindness. Accidents continue to take a heavy toll, in spite of a growing emphasis on safety measures and accident prevention. In a surprisingly large number of cases the cause of blindness is unknown to the person affected. This may be due in part to unfamiliarity with medical terminology, but it is probable that many cases of blindness have never been properly diagnosed by an eye specialist. This offers a likely field for "sight salvaging" work on a considerable scale.

Educational Background

The importance of education as a factor in vocational adjustment is recognized. It is of even greater importance to the physically handicapped than to the non-handicapped, in that it may compensate in part at least for the physical impairment. The extent to which the blind in California have had the advantage of school instruction is indicated in Table XI.

The percentage of the blind who have had no formal education at all is rather large, namely, 16.1 per cent. The second and third groups show that an additional 36 per cent have had a grammer school education or less. On the other hand, it is gratifying to note that a considerable number have attended high school and university. The figures shown do not indicate the extent of education for the blind in

the state, for the reason that so large a proportion of the blind have lost their sight late in life and therefore long after the usual school age. It is well known that the educational facilities in California for blind children are excellent, and that every effort is made to see that these children take full advantage of the opportunity for instruction.

TABLE XI

Distribution of the Blind According to Years of Schooling

	Number	*Per cent*
None	566	16.1
Grades 1 to 6	665	19.0
Grades 7 to 8	601	17.1
Grades 9 to 12 (high school)	712	20.4
Grades 13 to 16 (university)	257	7.3
Not stated	284	8.1
Now in school	427	12.2
Total	3,512	100.0

Ability to Read Raised Print

Free instruction in raised print reading is available to the blind of the state. The State Library provides the instructors and also maintains for circulation one of the largest collections of raised print books in the nation. It was deemed advisable to learn the extent to which the blind were taking advantage of these facilities, as a supplement to other records concerning this phase of work for the blind. The data are given in Table XII.

TABLE XII

Number and Percentage of the Blind Who Are Able to Read Raised Print

	Number	*Per cent*
Able to read raised print	1,241	35.3
Not able to read raised print	2,066	58.9
Not stated	205	5.8
Total	3,512	100.0

The fact that approximately 60 per cent of the blind do not read raised print is not surprising. Most of the blind lose their sight at an advanced age which makes it difficult for them to master the art of reading with their fingers. Also, even for the younger and middle aged groups, raised print reading with the fingers is slow and fatiguing with a possible exception in the cases of children congenitally blind or who have lost their sight in early childhood and have had continuous instruction and practice in school. Another factor is that sighted readers are often available who read to many of the blind from ordinary

newsprint. The radio with its drama and news broadcasts takes the place of reading also, and with the perfection of "talking books" another step will be taken in making readily available to all blind persons instructional, cultural, and entertainment material hitherto available for comparatively few. It is estimated that while approximately 40 per cent of the blind have the ability to read raised print, only about 10 per cent do so consistently and for pleasure.

Raised Print Systems Used

There are several systems of raised print in use. Table XIII indicates the proportions in which they are used by the blind.

TABLE XIII

Distribution of the Blind According to System of Raised Print Used

System	*Number*	*Per cent*
Moon	340	9.7
Revised Braille	789	22.5
American Braille	96	2.7
Others	83	2.3
None or not stated	2,204	62.8
Total	3,512	100.0

Of those reporting, the greatest number read some grade of Revised Braille. The next largest group consists of those who read the Moon system. These are for the most part persons who have lost their sight late in life. Moon is best adapted for their use for the reason that it is similar to ink-print in the formation of its characters and therefore easier to learn and to read. It is, however, a slower and more cumbersome system than Braille.

Desire for Raised Print Reading Instruction

The opinion has been expressed that many blind persons would like to learn to read raised print but have never had the opportunity. A query on this point was therefore included in the questionnaire; the information obtained from replies is shown in Table XIV.

TABLE XIV

Number of the Blind Who Desire Free Instruction in Reading Raised Print

	Number	*Per cent*
Blind who desire free instruction	366	16.1
Blind who do not desire free instruction	1,120	49.3
Not stated	785	34.6
Total	3,512	100.0

The relatively small number of blind persons who expressed a desire for free instruction in learning to read raised print is probably due to the fact that most of those who are able to learn and who feel the need for it have already taken advantage of the opportunity so freely offered. Of the large number who do not desire instruction, many may be actuated by the general dislike which the blind have for the slow, laborious task of reading with the fingers.

Present Employment Status of the Blind

There is sharp difference of opinion relative to the ability of the blind to work efficiently and safely. Many maintain that they are capable on suitable jobs and if given the opportunity could compete successfully with the sighted. Others believe that sheltered employment is the only solution of this problem. Probably the best opinion is that individual differences are just as marked among the blind as among the sighted and that they are capable and efficient on suitably selected jobs in about the same proportions. At any rate, data concerning their present employment status are obviously important; the number now employed is shown in Table XV.

TABLE XV

Distribution of the Blind According to Number Employed

	Number	*Per cent*
Blind now employed	176	5.0
Blind not now employed	3,199	91.1
Not stated	137	3.9
Total	3,512	100.0

The large number of the blind who are unemployed, 3,199 or 91.1 per cent, correlates very well with the equally staggering percentage who possess no earned income, as shown in Table XVI. It is also highly probable that those not stating whether they were employed or not could go to swell the figures on unemployment of the blind. This table is but another reflection of the truth that most of our blind, at least 91.1 per cent of them in fact, regardless of their age, are now unemployed and have always been so since being blind. Only about one blind person in every 20 has any kind of employment at all, sheltered or otherwise, even with the most meager of incomes. Most of the 176 who state that they are now employed are actually employed in some sheltered institution, working for mere pittances as judged by the income of the average American worker.

While it is true that a very large number of the blind are unemployable, due both to advanced age and to other disabilities in addition to their blindness, nevertheless, the number unemployed, 3,199

or 91.1 per cent, clearly indicates that the problem is grave and that its surface can scarcely be said to have been scratched as yet. Certainly for the group of 688 persons between the ages of 20 and 50 as shown in Table I there should be a greater number employed. The current economic depression does not wholly explain the situation found.

Period of Unemployment

It is reasonable to suppose that the current depression affects employment for the blind just as it does for the sighted. It was therefore desirable to secure data concerning the length of time blind workers have been unemployed since 1929. The information is given in Table XVI.

TABLE XVI

Distribution of the Blind According to Length of Period of Unemployment

Period of unemployment	*Number*	*Per cent*
Less than 1 year	39	1.1
1 year	61	1.7
2 years	113	3.2
3 years	126	3.6
4 years	107	3.0
More than 4 years	1,534	43.8
Not stated	1,356	38.6
Employed	175	5.0
Total	3,512	100.0

This tabulation confirms the conclusions to be drawn from the previous one as to the serious extent of unemployment among the blind, and indicates further that the situation is not new nor of recent origin. Even the showing that 12 per cent were employed to some extent during the past four years is not conclusively favorable, because it is known that some of this group lost their sight during that period and their loss of employment was therefore not wholly due to the depression.

Monthly Income

Obviously an economic survey would not be complete without a statement of earnings. These are shown in Table XVII.

Only 88 persons of the 3512 surveyed reported that they make even a bare living. Approximately 95 per cent of the blind of California have no earned income at all, and so are wholly dependent economically, either upon relatives and friends or upon society. This is an incredible situation, but its truth can not be doubted by anyone

familiar with the situation. The one significant thing which this table indicates is that definite, effective plans must be worked out and put into operation whereby this situation may be remedied. The tragic implication of this condition among the blind lies not so much in the extreme poverty of this class of persons as it does in the dangers of physical, mental, and spiritual deterioration to which their enforced idleness subjects them.

TABLE XVII

Distribution of the Blind According to Monthly Earnings

Earnings	*Number*	*Per cent*
Below $10.00	47	1.33
$10.00 to $20.00	41	1.17
$21.00 to $30.00	28	.79
$31.00 to $50.00	21	.60
$51.00 to $75.00	14	.41
Over $75.00	25	.71
Not stated or none	3,336	94.99
Total	3,512	100.00

It is undoubtedly true that incomes of the blind, like all others, are affected adversely by the current depression. It is also true that the advanced age of a major percentage of the blind is a factor affecting income. Nevertheless the figures shown in this table constitute a challenge to those interested in amelioration of the condition of the visually handicapped.

Occupational Training

Table XVIII lists the specific occupations for which the blind have been trained.

Training before onset of blindness is included in this tabulation as well as training following the incidence of blindness. This explains the inclusion of several occupations which are obviously not feasible for the blind. The significant feature to be noted is that more than 60 per cent report no occupational training at all. This is an important factor for consideration in connection with possible future vocational adjustment.

Present Occupations

It is obviously important to know in what lines of work the blind are successfully engaged. This does not mean that still other occupations may not be feasible for them, but it does indicate conclusively that blindness is not an insuperable barrier to the pursuit of the vocations listed in Table XIX.

TABLE XVIII

Distribution of the Blind According to Specific Occupation For Which Trained

Manufacturing and mechanical	*Number*	*Per cent*
Basket maker	15	.4
Blacksmith	18	.5
Broom maker	36	1.0
Butcher	1	
Carpenter	72	2.0
Machinist	7	.2
Miner	24	.7
Piano tuner	8	.2
Plumber	1	
Printer	1	
Stationery engraver	7	.2
Total	190	5.2
Professional service		
Accountant	3	.1
Actress	3	.1
Artist	1	
Attorney	7	.2
Advertising	1	
Chiropractor	6	.2
Minister	4	.1
Musician	86	2.4
Nurse	46	1.3
Physician	12	.3
School teacher	120	3.4
Total	289	8.1
Domestic Service		
Cook	18	.5
Gardener	15	.4
Seamstress	34	1.0
Total	67	1.9
Farming	91	2.6
Miscellaneous		
Clerk	34	1.0
Dictaphone operator	2	.1
Masseuse	1	
Milliner	2	.1
Salesman	48	1.3
Miscellaneous	673	19.5
Total	760	22.0
No occupation	2,115	60.2
Total	3,512	100.0

TABLE XIX

Distribution of the Blind According to Present Occupation

	Number	*Per cent*
No occupation	3,336	95.0
With occupations	176	5.0
	3,512	100.0

DETAILED CLASSIFICATION OF OCCUPATIONS FOLLOWED

Manufacturing and mechanical	*Number*	*Per cent*
Basket and reed worker	6	3.4
Book maker	1	.6
Cabinet maker	2	1.1
Laborer	1	.6
Mattress maker	2	1.1
Mechanic	1	.6
Metal worker	1	.6
Piano tuner	6	3.4
Violin maker	1	.6
Total	21	11.9
Trading		
Business man (not specified)	5	2.9
Grocer	5	2.9
Insurance salesman	10	5.7
Lumber business man	1	.6
Newsboy	11	6.4
Real estate man	1	.6
Salesmen	13	6.4
Transfer man	1	.6
Vender	10	5.7
Total	57	32.9
Farming		
Dairy worker	1	.6
Dairy farmer	1	.6
Poultry raiser	4	2.3
Total	6	3.5
Domestic Service		
Caretaker	1	.6
Dishwasher	1	.6
Gardener	2	1.1
Housekeeper	2	1.1
Seamstress	1	.6
Total	7	3.9
Professional Service		
Actress	1	.6
Advertising	1	.6
Braille school manager	1	.6

Professional Service—Continued	*Number*	*Per cent*
Chiropractor	14	8.0
Cosmetologist	1	.6
Entertainer	1	.6
Field agent	1	.6
Justice of the peace	2	1.1
Lawyer	2	1.1
Librarian	1	.6
Masseuse	1	.6
Minister	3	1.7
Musician	3	1.7
Music teacher	7	4.0
Nurse	2	1.1
Physician	2	1.1
Physical instructor	1	.6
Teacher	13	7.4
Transcriber	2	1.1
Tutor	4	2.3
Writer	2	1.1
Total	65	36.6
Miscellaneous		
Church worker	1	.6
Clerk	1	.6
Janitor	3	1.7
Laundry worker	1	.6
Manager apartment house	4	2.3
Proof reader (Braille)	6	3.4
Stereotypist	1	.6
Telephone operator	3	1.7
Total	20	11.3

The large number shown as having no occupation again reflects the deplorable condition of unemployment which has always existed among the blind. There is, to be sure, a surprisingly large number of occupations listed, but it will be noted that but few blind persons, usually one or two, engage in each. More than a third of the blind are serving professionally, and almost a third are engaged in some type of business. A relatively small number, 11.9 per cent, are in industry. The inference is that competition is possible in the professions and in business to a certain extent, but almost not at all in industry. The hopeful indication is that a wide variety of occupations is available for the blind.

Employment Wanted

It has always been known that the advanced age of a large proportion of the blind precluded the feasibility of or desire for employment. But it was not known how many of the blind are seeking an opportunity to work. This information is now available, as shown in Table XX.

TABLE XX

Distribution of the Blind According to the Number Seeking Work

	Number	*Per cent*
Blind seeking work	393	11.2
Blind not seeking work	2,856	81.3
Not stated	263	7.5
Total	3,512	100.0

The number of blind persons not seeking work may seem surprisingly large, but it must be remembered that 2389, or 68 per cent of all the blind in the state are over 50 years of age. Both age and blindness are serious vocational handicaps, and when the two conditions are combined employment is virtually out of the question. It is quite possible that another group has become discouraged in the search for employment and has come to believe that it is unattainable. Others have additional physical defects and are therefore doubly handicapped. On the other hand, it is likely that practically all of the younger group who consider themselves employable are anxiously seeking work, however vainly under present conditions.

Relief Status

This item was included in the questionnaire at the request of the State Emergency Relief Administration as a check on other studies made by them in this field. The findings are recorded in Table XXI.

TABLE XXI

Relief Status of the Blind

	Number	*Per cent*
Blind on relief	202	5.8
Blind not on relief	3,139	89.3
Not stated	171	4.9
Total	3,512	100.0

While the number of blind persons shown as not on relief is very large, it is probable that the actual percentage is even higher if all state aid to the blind were excluded. The questionnaire specifically excepted state aid from this question, but it is quite possible that some replies included this as in the nature of relief. The low percentage of blind on relief is probably accounted for in large measure by the fact that as of January 31, 1935, a total of 3216 blind persons were receiving state aid. This is 46.2 per cent of all the blind in the state, and it is interesting to note in this connection that the general opinion heretofore has been that between 70 and 80 per cent of the blind were receiving state aid.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS BY THE BLIND

On the reverse of the questionnaire form was printed the following direction:

> Please give below your suggestions and comments as to work for the blind and any other remarks you may care to make.

The following lists are tabulations of the suggestions and comments received. The numbers indicate the frequency of the same suggestion by different blind persons.

Suggestions for Employment

SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS

Manufacturing and Mechanical Work

PBX operation	7
Typing	6
Weaving	3
Sewing	2
Basketry	2
Knitting	2
Telegraph operation	2
Mimeograph work	1
Dictaphone operator	1
Piano tuning and repair	1
Developing and printing	1
Fruit packing	1
Radio operation	1
Racquet restringing	1
Electrical assembly work	1

Professional Service

Music and art	33
Writing	11
Teaching	7
Salesmanship	6
Social work	5
Chiropractic	5
Massage	4
Osteopathy	2
Politics	2
Law	1
Insurance	1

Trading

Cigar stand operating	3
Newspaper vending (monopoly)	3
Beauty shop operation	1

Farming

Poultry raising	5
Ranching	1

Domestic Service

Housework	5
Children's nursing	1

Miscellaneous

Lecturing	2
Interpreting	2
Proof reading, Braille	2
Elevator operating	2
Apartment house management	2
Tea and coffee tasting	1
Braille library work	1

General Suggestions

Induce employers to hire blind persons	9
Set up a placement agency for the blind	1
Blind workers to be employed in work for the blind	1
Readers for the blind in their homes	1
Loan fund for establishment of small businesses	1
Establish salesrooms for selling products of blind	1
More and larger trade schools and shops	1

Other Comments

Ailments other than blindness which prevent employment

Age	120
Crippled condition	35
Deafness	18
Others	129
Total	302

Desire and need for increased state aid	55
Desire immediate work of any kind	48
Desire some state aid, any amount	31
Comfort from Braille reading	24
Praise of work of various agencies	32
A hotel be established for the blind	2
Free street car transportation	2

Quotations From Replies Received From Blind Persons

Other comments and suggestions which can not be listed or summarized are contained in the following excerpts from replies to the questionnaire:

The intelligent blind should be trained for the professions.

I think that an effort should be made for larger pensions for the blind because the blind are much more helpless than the aged—especially where old age and blindness are combined, as in so many cases.

If blind persons would combine in some central workshop, supported by the state, they could earn more than by each individually bucking the stream.

It would be a good thing if a few specific courses could be obtained from the libraries dealing with story writing, household hints or aids for the blind, and other specific pursuits.

A traveling physician would do a great deal of salvage work among the blind—restoring at least partial vision to many.

I think all (blind) are much more contented if employed.

Connect the blind with self-help or cooperative movements.

Small business projects should be encouraged.

Would suggest that capable blind persons be given the opportunity of training the blind.

Would like to suggest that handicapped children study under handicapped teachers. They would find that they themselves are better understood by others who are in the same condition.

A central market for blind-made articles is essential.

More unity among associations and organizations working for the blind.

Blind people who are willing to help themselves should not be forced to become paupers before state aid is given. Pensions for the blind should not be administered by county welfare workers, but by a commission especially created for that purpose.

More blind field workers, and more blind men and women in all agencies concerned with the welfare of the blind.

In large measure, employment of the blind depends upon the creation of confidence in the blind themselves and in those among which employment is sought.

All young blind who have sufficient intelligence should be given college training. Other blind should be located by a placement officer in factories where they should be given specialized jobs.

No unnecessary aid or pampering (of the blind) that might bring on an inferiority complex.

The less intelligent blind should be given more care and rehabilitation than now.

The federal government should make it mandatory for employers to employ blind persons, their wages to be paid by the federal government.

I would recommend an "Employers' Reimbursement Bill" which would provide that employers of blind workmen be reimbursed by the state or federal government to the extent of one-third of the salary or wage paid to blind employees. Code regulations and minimum wage laws make it impossible for a blind person to offer his services for less than the fixed scale. Since a blind employee is less efficient than a sighted employee, employers refuse to employ blind workers at the prevailing rates. An Employers' Reimbursement Bill would correct this fault.

I conclude from my own experience that the suggestion of inferior vision often prejudices the prospective buyer of personal services. This instills a distrust of oneself. The professions of social welfare work, teaching, and writing are about the only ones practicable for the blind to enter. A board or department for placing blind persons on completion of their education or training is *vitally necessary*. Unless our highly-educated blind can be suitably placed in blind social welfare work, and as teachers of the blind—both being admirably suited to abilities of trained blind persons—their continued higher education is wasteful; and we have a moral and evil neglect of talent and ability. The enterprising blind will eventually lose interest in bettering themselves if this condition obtains much longer.

It will be seen that most of the comments voluntarily given on the reverse side of the questionnaire concern one phase or another of the outstanding problem of blindness—employment. Altogether, a total of 777 persons made comments on the back of their questionnaires. This means that some 22 per cent of all those sending in completed questionnaires had some specific suggestions to make.

CONCLUSION

It has been ascertained through the census that there are at least 6960 blind persons living in California at the present time. This number includes only bona fide residents of the state who are economically blind. It is believed that the figure is accurate. Every name in the file was checked against the records of all public agencies dealing with the blind in each county of the state. If anything the figure is an understatement of the real total, since it is improbable that every blind individual in the state has been contacted. On the other hand, the search and study were so painstakingly made and every possible source of information so thoroughly exhausted that it is probable that the actual number of blind in California does not greatly exceed 7000.

The fact that more than half of the blind persons in the state answered and returned the questionnaires assures the validity of the statistical data given in the report. On this sound basis conclusions may be safely drawn which reveal significant trends and afford a clear, accurate picture of the present economic and social status of the blind in California

Important and necessary as these two steps are, it must be clearly understood that they are merely preliminary. The data obtained furnish a definite point of departure from which intelligent and effective steps may now be taken toward a solution of the problems herein presented. The more complete information contained in the questionnaires will be made available to the public agencies concerned in order that specific needs and desires in individual cases may be met in so far as is possible and that plans may be made for general betterments in service for the blind.

It is the fervent hope of all whose efforts made possible the success of this census and economic survey of the blind of California that the problem of unemployment among the blind will soon be vigorously attacked. If the findings of this study are an aid in paving the way for a successful campaign, then the work will have been well done, and well worth the doing.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE USED IN CENSUS AND ECONOMIC SURVEY STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

BUREAU OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

In Cooperation With

THE CALIFORNIA COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND

Census and Economic Survey of the Blind

Name_____ Address_____ City_____

Age_____Sex_____Native or foreign born_____Marital status_____

Head of family?_____Number of dependents: Minor_____Adult_____

Do you have light perception?_____

Can you recognize your friends by sight?_____

Can you read newspaper headlines?_____

How long can you read ordinary print without hurting your eyes?_____

Cause of blindness_____How long blind?_____

Education:

Are you now in school?_____

Number of years of schooling?_____College?_____

Specific occupation trained for?_____Years_____

Has training been used?_____Is it now being used?_____

Can you read raised print?_____If so, what system?_____

If you can not, would you like free instruction?_____

Work Performed During Past Ten Years	Occupation	In Home, Outside or Sheltered?	Average Earnings Per Month	How Long Employed
Present employment				
Last employment				
Other employment				

How long unemployed since 1929?_____

Are you seeking work?_____Are you on relief (other than State aid)?_____

If on work relief, what work are you doing?_____

Are you receiving compensation?_____

If unemployed, what reason is given?_____

Training or employment wanted or advised_____

NOTE: This survey was undertaken at the specific request of the California Council for the Blind, and is carried on in cooperation with the Council's Committee appointed for that purpose. The objective is to secure data concerning the blind which may be used for their welfare. All information given will be treated as strictly confidential, and will be used only for statistical purposes and for a report on the status of the blind, without names or personal references. Your active cooperation is earnestly solicited.

Please return promptly to Room 505, Metropolitan High School, 234 Venice Blvd., Los Angeles

Please give on the reverse side your suggestions and comments as to work for the blind and any other remarks you may care to make.

LETTER TO THE BLIND ENCLOSING QUESTIONNAIRE AND REQUESTING COOPERATION

CALIFORNIA COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND

Newel Perry, Ph.D., President, 105 State Bldg., Los Angeles, Cal.

February 15, 1935

Dear Friend:

The California Council for the Blind is conducting a census and economic survey to discover the employment opportunities for the blind in this State. This survey, of which the enclosed questionnaire is a part, will provide definite information concerning work and work conditions for the blind, and other information which is essential in making plans to improve their condition. One particular benefit will be the eventual placement on suitable jobs of a greater number of the blind who are employable.

The first step toward our common goal is to ask every blind person in California to cooperate with his Council by promptly filling out the enclosed questionnaire and returning it to us in the stamped, addressed envelope which accompanies it.

The California Council for the Blind is a state wide organization dedicated to the promotion of the welfare of the blind. It is composed of those persons most interested in the various phases of work for the blind, and representatives of the associations of the blind in this State. A majority of those having seats on the Council are blind persons.

This survey has been made possible because it has been approved as a research project by the SERA under the sponsorship of the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, State Department of Education.

Please let me assure you that all information which you give us on the completed questionnaire will be held in strictest confidence, and cannot in any way result in causing a reduction in the amount of state aid that may now be received.

I am asking you personally to cooperate with your Council to the end that our fellow blind of California may be helped. Please fill out the questionnaire fully and return it promptly.

Very sincerely yours,

NEWEL PERRY
President, California Council for the Blind

FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO THE BLIND

CALIFORNIA COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND

Newel Perry, Ph.D., President, 105 State Bldg., Los Angeles, Cal.

February 25, 1935

Dear Friend:

Recently I sent you a questionnaire and letter urging your cooperation with the Council by filling out and returning the questionnaire. I pointed out that your Council needed your personal help if it hopes to make any progress toward our common goal of securing information which will help in placing our fellow blind in jobs.

I am at a loss to know just why I haven't had a reply from you, especially since a stamped, addressed envelope was enclosed for your convenience in returning the filled-in questionnaire.

I know that you would send it in at once if you realized that your reply will aid in getting a job for even a single blind person. I can assure you that your reply, with the replies of others, will certainly help in making possible the employment of not only one but of many blind.

Perhaps your failure to respond was due to a fear in your mind that the information requested by the questionnaire might in some way react to your detriment. Let me reassure you that all information given us will be held in absolute confidence. This data will be used solely for a report on the economic status of the blind, entirely without names or personal reference of any sort. We hope that such data will form the basis of future efforts to actually place blind people in remunerative positions.

Now, won't you help the Council, which is *your* Council, to promote the economic welfare of our fellow blind by filling out the questionnaire fully and returning it to us today? Thank you.

Very sincerely yours,

NEWEL PERRY
President, California Council for the Blind

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